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ABSTRACT

Two addresses dealing with educational change, given at the NAIS conference in March, 1972, are presented in this brief pamphlet. In the first, Bruce McClellan speaks about the need for independent schools to respond to challenges of social change in an optimistic rather than a pessimistic manner as they face the task of educating a new generation for a new world. With increasing technology the need for individual freedom and self-awareness becomes greater as a counterpoise. Because we live in a world of struggle between anonymity of machinery and technology and the inner tensions of humanity -- a world also of creative and destructive forces -- a paradoxical situation exists. The challenge is to first recognize the problem, and then respond to it. In the second speech, Esther E. Osgood briefly describes a panorama of educational interests and reform during the last forty years in independent schools. Each decade focused upon different aspects of education, evidence that education is a constant flux of change and will always be different in the future. (SJM)

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Renewal: The Challenge to the Schools

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The View from "Forty Years On"

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Addresses given at the NAIS Annual Conference Luncheon March 3, 1972

RENEWAL:
The Challenge to the Schools

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BOY, I yearned for the days of great American heroes. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams—those were names to conjure with! How I lamented that my life seemed to offer so little opportunity for greatness, grandeur, and achievement.

Now I am a man and recognize that those Revolutionary heroes must frequently have faced self-doubts, despair in the extreme, and great disillusionment. Yankee Doodle was not always on bright parade.

"These are the times that try men's souls." Thomas Paine.

That glorious opportunity of the years of the American Revolution had its share of trial, of error, of confusion, of seemingly impossible tasks. The bloody snows underfoot at Valley Forge express vividly the difficult, seemingly purposeless, almost inexplicable sufferings which Americans everywhere during those years must have felt.

"Give me no fair weather patriots."

No one ever likes to be shaken up. No one ever likes to change those things with which he is familiar, whatever their shortcomings may be.

From the Declaration of Independence: "Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."

Who has been more shaken up in the last five years of radical change in education than we of the independent school community? More than most we ourselves have been committed to the old doggerel

> Reading, and writing, and 'rithmetic
> Taught to the tune of the hickory stick.

And where have reading, and writing, and 'rithmetic gone? What has happened to the hickory stick? It was convenient. Our comfortable and cosy understandings about what a school should be—what a society should be—have been shaken to their very foundations.

We who teach have company in our feeling that the world is somehow different from what it once was. The whole country trembles in a crisis of confidence. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., writes, "America is unquestionably experiencing an extreme crisis of confidence. And this crisis is unquestionably not illusory, even if it coexists with affluence, social gains,

and scientific miracles. It is a crisis with many sources; but none is more important, I think, than the incessant and irreversible increase in the rate of social change."

We all recognize what Alvin Toffler has called "future shock"—future shock in the larger world around us, just as we see it and feel it in our daily lives within the microcosm of our particular independent schools. Every year costs go up a percentage point or two more than income. We see no way of altering the ratio, either by joining one of the monopoly power groups—capital or labor—or by increasing productivity, which would drastically change the quality and nature of what we do. Student attitudes about authority, organization, life styles, drugs, and values present us with dilemmas for which we see no solutions. Schools are in trouble with parents too. To use John Verdery's words—"Parents oppose boarding school because they don't think it can any longer do the job they want done, while the son is against boarding school because he is afraid that it will." An article in *Newsweek* at the end of January asks, "Can prep schools survive?" Most of us have asked that question of ourselves in the last five years.

The editors of *Newsweek* were right to ask that question, and all of us have good reason to be concerned about the future of our schools. I am no Pollyanna. I have had those same uneasy, hollow-stomach doubts and premonitions which we have all felt. On the other hand, I agree absolutely with our legendary Dr. Frank Boyden of Deerfield, who recently said he thought that "the boarding schools were doing themselves harm by their own moaning and groaning." Much the same might be said of all independent schools—not to speak of all schools everywhere, with their prevailing mood of pessimism as they face the challenge of educating a new generation for a new world.

The wrong symptoms demoralize us for the wrong reasons. When a teacher's job—a school's job—is tougher, the best people—the best schools—have the best opportunity to show their quality. If we believe what we say about our strengths, we often do not show much evidence of our belief. Where are the initiative, the imagination, the personal commitment? Where are the values that we so frequently mention when we talk about the hallmarks of independent school education? This country needs these very qualities now in its schools as well as in all else that is happening.

Had the founding fathers of this great country of ours succumbed to their fears, to their pessimism, to negativism which they sensed, to defeat, they never would have brought forth a new nation, which with all of its shortcomings and imperfections stands still a guiding light to a whole world and remains a unique experiment in government of the people, by the people, for the people.

With particular regard to our independent schools, I am sometimes more concerned about what we have failed to recognize about ourselves in years past than I am by attitudes toward the problems which we face now. If now we can see clearly what we have been, we are perhaps in a better position to meet our current predicaments more creatively. Peter Schrag put it well in a newly published book, *The Decline of the Wasp:* "The [independent schools] of this world grew great when the social assumptions on which they operated were taken for granted, when the students, the school, and the parent agreed (at least on the surface) on where the kid's place would be, on what sort of world it was, and on how he should be trained to get there."

This social challenge as Peter Schrag describes it is perfectly clear. Parallel to it is a technological challenge, and I turn to an unexpected source for a statement about just what that challenge means to us. From Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich:* "Every country in the world today faces the danger of being terrified by technology; but in a modern dictatorship this seems to me unavoidable. Therefore, the more technological the world becomes, the more essential will be the demand for individual freedom and the self-awareness of the individual human being as a counterpoise to technology." Speer's final speech at the Nuremberg Trial adds with particular poignance a point of view about the changes which Americans now face.

Or take the environmentalist's point of view. "What men have lost . . . is what Dr. René Dubos calls a 'theology of the earth'—the sacred relationships that link humankind to all the physical attributes of the planet."

You know the faddish names writing about our era of profound change—Brzezinski, Commoner, McLuhan, Toffler. In my opinion, each speaks some truth. You also know what is happening without reading anybody's books.

We live in a world of titanic struggle between the anonymity of machinery and technology and the inner tensions of humanity. Who knows who he is in a society as mobile as ours? Who will slow down and stop at an interstate highway outside Rochester to help a fourteen-year-old girl running naked through the snow and screaming for help? Would we have stopped? Or would we have worried too much about getting to the supermarket before it closes?

We are in turn petrified and anesthetized by our scientific ability to do harm. Not just with atomic weapons—awful enough in themselves—but with an automobile which can kill and maim more innocents in thirty seconds than any medieval warrior with his long sword could draw and quarter in a lifetime. And so we surge headlong forward through the dense fog on the turnpike at 60 miles an hour.

My purpose here is not to analyze revolutions clearly taking place. Rather I wish to speak about our willingness to face the challenges which these revolutions present. Here, I think, we speak from particular strength rather than from particular weakness.

We must face with resolution the desperate need of our society to find effective new means of responding to the social challenges of drug use, of changed sexual mores, and of "plastic Amerika." The answers appear as difficult as the problems, but men and women of good will must surely wrestle with them as Jacob wrestled with the Angel at the bottom of the ladder. We shall, of course, make miserable mistakes. We shall enjoy precious few triumphs. But the act of facing courageously what we plainly know to be a crucial series of questions ought to give us heart and strength.

Recently I attended a Yevtushenko poetry reading, only a few days after a bomb had blasted Sol Hurok's office. The Russian read his poem about the bombing, "The Balalaika and the Bomb." The juxtaposition of creative with destructive forces was very moving, and as I listened to the reading I could not help thinking how this paradoxical situation symbolized the tensions which we all face. At that point the theater manager came to the stage and asked us to leave. There had been a telephoned bomb threat.

The threat of destruction only increases the great need we all have for beauty, and especially for appreciation of beauty among young people. Here is something we must hold on to fervently in our schools because it is under attack not only by the machines of our age but also by the gray bureaucrats of pedagogy and the petty, pedestrian managers of impersonal industry.

And you will not be surprised if I move to a poet—to W. H. Auden writing about the first moon landing:*

> Unsmudged, thank God, my Moon still queens the Heavens
> as She ebbs and fulls, a Presence to glop at,
> Her Old Man, made of grit not protein,
> still visits my Austrian several [hideaway]
>
> with His old detachment, and the old warnings
> still have power to scare me: Hybris comes to
> a nasty finish, Irreverence
> is a greater oaf than Superstition.

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* Excerpted from the poem "Moon Landing," first published in *The New Yorker.* Copyright © 69 by W. H. Auden. "Moon Landing" will appear in W. H. Auden's book *Epistle to a Godson,* to be published by Random House, Inc.

Our apparatniks will continue making
the usual squalid mess called Histo.y;
all we can pray for is that artists,
chefs and saints may still appear to blithe it.

I return to my childhood thoughts about Revolutionary heroes. This is a revolutionary time, and we have a major part in it because the young express the revolution in a particular way, though it also affects their elders profoundly. Our country needs heroes as never before.

Can we face the challenge that others hide from in craven fear?

Have we the courage to live with the paradox of the bomb and the balalaika?

Are we prepared to make a commitment to beauty in everyone's life?

Finally, are we captives of that ancient *Hybris*—our own overweening pride? Have we been captured?

I put it bluntly. Have we not in our independent schools allowed our pride in what was to stand in the way of our responding creatively to what is?

Our only reason for being is to respond creatively, flexibly, to the world in which we live.

I have not always been proud of myself in these recent years, or of my colleagues in their sometimes feckless response to circumstances which really ought to present an unparalleled opportunity.

I am an optimist about our schools, about our young people, about America. But I am enough of a student of history also to know that simple-minded optimism has no claim upon favorable judgments either from history or from current events. We've got to work at it, and to do that we have got to recognize, first of all, what the problem is and, secondly, that we are in a unique position to respond to it.

That is our challenge, and I say simply for myself that I think there can be no greater opportunity than the challenge of being part of creation—the creation of a child's mind, heart, sensibilities; the creation of a country's response to great and unanticipated changes; the creation of a new, humane, more individually responsive world.

The challenge of renewal belongs uniquely to the teacher not just for one generation but for all generations. In our care lies the future.

BRUCE MCCLELLAN
Headmaster
Lawrenceville School

THE VIEW
from "Forty Years On"

THEY SAY A DROWNING PERSON sees his whole life flash before his eyes. I can't vouch for this, never having drowned, but I *can* vouch for the fact that a person about to retire—or at least *this* person about to retire—sees her whole professional life flash before her eyes. And when it encompasses, as mine does, four decades, the panorama has some historical interest.

I started out in the 30's during the Depression. Then, as now, independent schools were facing a financial crisis. In spite of it—or more likely because of it—the decade was a lively one educationally. Schools were concerned with college entrance requirements; with the validity of tests—"a closer integration of what education is attempting and what tests are measuring"; with the progressive education movement (they were using the term "activity curriculum" and saying that "secondary education can be greatly vitalized when it becomes adjusted to the needs of adolescents and presents activities which have meaning in terms of those needs"); and with the Eight-Year Study, in which thirty public and private schools and a goodly number of colleges participated. By waiving the Carnegie Units in their admission of students from the thirty schools, the colleges made it possible for each of the schools to initiate its own kinds of curricular innovation. The school and college records of the participating students were carefully studied and evaluated. The report of the study comprised five volumes.

In the 30's, Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago was talking about his "great books" doctrine, and Stringfellow Barr of St. John's College was propounding his theories of liberal education.

The 40's were ushered in by World War II, which effectively put an end to thoughts of implementing the findings of the Eight-Year Study and eventually caused the death of the progressive education movement. The cry was: "How can education help to win the war and win the peace?" Schools introduced work programs, many of which are still in existence; turned their campuses into farms; lent basement rooms and chapel towers to Civilian Defense for report centers and airplane spot-

ting; talked about education for citizenship and public service; worried about the atom bomb; and talked and talked and talked about the post-war world.

When the war ended in 1945 the educators were ready. Almost at once two important books were published: *Education for ALL American Youth,* by the Educational Policies Commission of the NEA, and *General Education in a Free Society,* by Harvard University. The argument of both books was that equally good educational opportunities should be provided for all young people according to their individual abilities, and that everyone—the minority who went to college and the majority who didn't—should share "common learnings" or "general education" so that all would have a bond in common in their later lives.

The 50's were conservative. This was the decade of the college entrance syndrome and Advanced Placement, which began in 1954. Students were single-minded in their desire to get into the college of their choice. We scolded them for their total lack of interest in the world around them; they scolded their teachers for wasting time by telling jokes in class. You remember those quiet, neat, serious students of the 50's—those shorthaired schoolboys carrying attaché cases!

In the 50's schools were equally single-minded in their desire to get their students into the best colleges. To do this they needed the brightest students, of course, which led to an interest in financial aid programs. The School Scholarship Service was born. Schools in the 50's were also interested in public relations techniques, the use of electronic devices in the classroom, and the education of trustees.

Then, in 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik and, with Admiral Rickover's voice of doom ringing in our ears, we were shot straight into the Space Age, where for a time science was king and we had the new physics, the new chemistry, the new biology, the new math.

The 60's brought us Vietnam. They also brought us the study of the Russian language and visits to Russia, Asian Studies, teacher training for independent school teachers, computers, enrichment programs for inner-city children, the federal government's interest in education, Black students, campus unrest, long hair, dropouts, and independent study.

The late 60's and early 70's have brought us free schools, sensitivity training, affective learning, Black teachers, off-campus education, pass/fail, the open classroom. Shades of progressive education and the Eight-Year Study! Is this where I came in? No. Nothing is ever quite the same. History does not repeat itself. Everything changes.

What lies ahead? The old verse gives the best advice:

> My gran'ther's rule was safer'n 'tis to crow—
> Don't never prophesy onless ye know!

The next forty years will be different. I am sure they will be exciting. Enjoy them!

ESTHER E. OSGOOD
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